Claims

1. A method for monitoring a wireless network comprised of a plurality of access points coupled to a plurality of stations, the method comprising the steps of:

converting a selected access point into a probe device;

performing probe operations by the probe device; and

forwarding information retrieved from the probe operations to a management device.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of converting the selected access point includes the step of forwarding a Probe command to the selected access point.

3. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of converting the selected access point into a probe device includes the steps of disassociating stations coupled to the selected access point from the selected access point.

4. The method of claim 3, wherein the step of disassociating stations includes the step of forwarding a Reset command to each station coupled to the selected access point.

5.   The method of claim 3, wherein the step of disassociating stations includes the step of failing to respond to communications from each station coupled to the selected access point.

6.   The method of claim 1, wherein the selected access point is selected in response to its proximity to an unauthorized access point.

7.   The method of claim 1 wherein the selected access point is automatically selected in response to the detection of a network problem.

8.   The method of claim 1, wherein the selected access point is automatically selected in response to a periodic scan of each of the plurality of access points in the network.

9.   The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of converting the probe device into an access point after forwarding information to the management device.

10.   The method of claim 1, wherein the selected access point includes a plurality of radio frequency channels, and wherein the selected access point continues to serve as an access point for a first subset of the plurality of channels and serve as a probe device for a second subset of the plurality of channels.

11.   A device comprising:

means for operating as an access device to permit a plurality of wirelessly coupled devices to communicate with a wired network, the access device and the plurality of wirelessly coupled devices forming a wireless network;

5

means for operating as a probe device for scanning the plurality of wirelessly coupled devices to obtain operating statistics for the wireless network; and

means for selectively operating as either the access device or the probe device in response to receipt of a command at the device.

10

12.   The device of claim 11, wherein the command is a Probe command forwarded by a network manager to the device.

13.   The device of claim 11, wherein the command is a Probe command received a command line interface on the device.

15   14.   The device of claim 11, wherein the Probe command is automatically generated by the device in response to an event.

15.   The device of claim 14, wherein the event is the detection of an unauthorized access point in the network.

16.   The device of claim 14, wherein the event is the detection of network

20   performance degradation in the wireless network.

17.   The device of claim 14, wherein the means for operating as an access point operates over a range or channels, and wherein the means for operating as a probe device operates over the range of channels, and wherein the device

operates as an access device over a first subset of the range of channels and

operates as a probe device over a second subset of the range of channels.